

THE BISHOP'S COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 26 NOVEMBER 2024 AT ETHELDREDA HOUSE

Present: The Bishop of Huntingdon (Chair), Revd Canon Brian Atling, Revd Canon James Blandford-Baker, Very Revd Mark Bonney, Canon Dr Felicity Cooke, Miss Lindsay Davies, Revd Canon Becky Dyball, Revd Canon Sarah Gower, Ven Richard Harlow, Ven Dr Alex Hughes, Mrs Elaine Levitt, Mr George Lynn, Revd Canon Rob Mackley, Canon Peter Maxwell, Canon Rob Needle, Canon Janet Perrett, Mr John Pigott, Mr Christopher Townsend, Canon Tim Walters, Mrs Sarah Robinson

In attendance: Mrs Rebecca Boswell, Revd Iain Osborne, Mr Jon Young, Mrs Shirley Breeze (Clerk)

	The meeting opened with Dwelling in the Word led by Canon Rob Needle
1.	Apologies were received from Canon Paul Evans, Canon Simon Kershaw, Revd Peter Leech, Revd Canon Simon Talbott, Canon Lizzie Taylor, Revd Canon Dr Jessica Martin
2.	<p>Minutes of the Bishop's Council meetings held on 26 September 2024</p> <p>The minutes of the Council meeting held on 26 September were approved and signed, the following amendment having been made:</p> <p><u>Min 6.8 Ministry Share August 2024</u> Last two sentences amended to read '....to rise. Ultimately the cost is borne by all other parishes and there is a risk this may affect the poorest parishes the most. A concern was expressed that there is no transparency....'</p> <p>Matters arising</p> <p><u>Min 6.7 Ministry Share Proposal for 2025</u> Final paper will go to Deanery Liaison Group on 3 December. There have been only minor amendments to the document to reflect the situation in some deaneries. The final proposal will be circulated to all Bishop's Council members.</p>
3.	<p>Election results</p> <p>Newly elected members for the 2025-2028 Bishop's Council were noted as follows:</p> <p><u>House of Clergy</u> Revd Dr Beth Cope, Revd Danny Driver, Revd Dr Rob Mackley (Cambridge) Revd Natalie Andrews, Revd Becky Dyball, Revd Canon Philip Howson (Huntingdon & Wisbech)</p> <p><u>House of Laity</u> Dr Felicity Cooke, Mrs Sarah Robinson, Mr Jon Smith (Cambridge) Mr Christopher Falvey, Mrs Elaine Levitt, Canon Janet Perrett, Mr John Pigott (Huntingdon & Wisbech)</p> <p>This leaves two lay vacancies in Cambridge and one lay vacancy in Huntingdon & Wisbech.</p> <p>A further election will be held to try to fill these vacancies, the deadline for which will be 15th December. The Council can also co-opt up to four members.</p> <p>Departing members were noted as Canon Peter Maxwell, Canon Lizzie Taylor and Revd Canon Dr Jessica Martin.</p> <p>Bishop Dagmar is keen to involve young people on the Council and has discussed with members of the Mission & Ministry team about this.</p>

4. **Safeguarding update**

The independent review by Keith Makin into the Church of England's handling of allegations of serious abuse by the late John Smyth was published on 7 November. There are 27 recommendations, the majority of which will be led by the national safeguarding team. The Ely Safeguarding team welcomes the recommendations and will consider them now in detail, noting work already underway. They wholeheartedly endorse the reviewer's emphasis that safeguarding must be the responsibility of everyone in the Church. The team are also dealing with recommendations from numerous diocesan audits and from the Mike Pilavachi report. The report has created a big impact across the diocese leading to a significant rise in referral numbers. Sessions have been organised with parish safeguarding officers to support them and additional support will also be offered to clergy as a priority.

The safeguarding team has received 219 referrals in the year to date. The majority of these relate to concerns regarding congregation members and church social outreach users. There are 95 open concerns, two of which are in relation to a Church Safety Plan, with one pending. Less than 5 cases are being managed under Allegations against Church Officers Guidance. Most concerns relate to mental health and concerning adult behaviour; the majority were offered advice and signposting. Referrals consistently identify issues in relation to safeguarding practice in parishes involving gaps in safer recruitment or in training.

1435 DBS checks were carried out this year to date.

The Learning Development framework has now been published from which an Ely training strategy will be developed for January 2025. Domestic abuse training for PCC members is now recommended rather than compulsory.

Parish Safeguarding Dashboards have switched over to align with the National Safeguarding Standards this month which has caused Ely's overall compliance scores to drop back. The team will focus on supporting parishes to work with the new style dashboards. Ely now has 88.9% of parishes using these. Nationally, Ely is in eighth position out of the 38 dioceses using the dashboards.

Work on the recommendations of the Jay Report is ongoing. The future of safeguarding in the Church of England will be discussed at the next General Synod meeting, in particular various models for independent safeguarding. The full report of the lessons learned review in relation to Soul Survivor/Mike Pilavachi is available on the Church of England website.

In relation to IICSA (Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse) recommendations 1 and 8, Joanne Fowler has been appointed as Eastern Regional Safeguarding Adviser from December. This role provides another layer of advice and support to dioceses. Timescales for the transition to Regional Network/Diocesan Safeguarding Officer Role are still awaited.

Concerns were raised by members that witnesses to the abuse had completed safeguarding training but had failed to act appropriately and it was queried how training could be audited and impact measured. Face to face training is much more valuable than online as it prompts discussion. There is now a shift to a group approach to safeguarding rather than individuals in front of a screen in their own home.

The Makin Report highlights a lack of curiosity as a problem, thus causing people to worry they should not only report safeguarding concerns but investigate further. However, this is not the case. Moreover, the situation has changed in that now anyone reporting a concern will trigger an audit trail by which all communications are logged when a concern is reported, and the person reporting will hear back.

5.	<p>Bishop's Business: The Bishop of Huntingdon & Acting Bishop of Ely</p> <p>Bishop Dagmar had received, understandably, several angry letters after the Makin Report was published. She emphasised that the failings were inexcusable. Nonetheless, some of the developing narrative in the media was overtaking the facts. Eg Archbishop Justin had done much to improve safeguarding practice and had commissioned the Makin report as well as pushed for independent safeguarding for the Church of England. Bishop Dagmar was grateful to the Diocesan Safeguarding team for arranging a series of drop ins for Parish Safeguarding Officers to provide advice and support. Bishop Dagmar has sent a pastoral support letter to diocesan clergy members, ordinands and LLMs.</p> <p>The Mothers' Union has arranged an online event on domestic abuse on 10 December.</p> <p>The Archbishop's Appointments Secretary has assured us that the appointment process for a new Archbishop of Canterbury will not delay the appointment process for the Bishop of Ely; interviews are still due to take place in November 2025.</p>
6.	<p>Trustee Assurance Group: Ven Richard Harlow, TAG Chair</p> <p>The Ven Harlow drew attention to the baseline report, noting that EDBF has a high calibre of staff many of whom would be difficult to replace on the open market. There is also vulnerability for some EDBF departments which are reliant on a single, very experienced person. Further consideration may be needed as to how risk is monitored. The next strategic plan should be translated into a business plan for EDBF.</p> <p>It was queried whether Bishop's Council wishes TAG to continue and how its role fits with that of the Audit Committee. Canon Walters recognised that a lot of in-depth work had been completed and TAG fulfilled a role in the absence of the Audit Committee, which has now been reconvened. Agreement is needed as to whom that committee reports to as there was concern if it reports direct to EDBF. The committees need to decide how they work together as a partnership and agree priorities; both form part of assurance for trustees. The relationship between TAG and the Audit Committee needs clarification.</p> <p>It was noted that in any risk register, one of the key items is to establish who is responsible for managing items. It was felt this work needs to be driven by members of the organisation not by an independent group. Members noted that whilst some proposals are not explicit in how they will be actioned, it would be a shame to lose momentum.</p> <p>It was agreed that Mr George Lynn, Chair of the Audit Committee, meets with Ven Harlow and Revd Osborne to discuss further and to bring back a definitive set of terms of reference to Bishop's Council in January. It was agreed, with one abstention, that Mr John Pigott should also take part in discussions.</p> <p>Bishop Dagmar agreed to give a presentation on mission priorities at the January meeting.</p>
7.	<p>Governance: The Bishop of Huntingdon & Acting Bishop of Ely, and Revd Iain Osborne, Director of Strategy</p> <p>Governance Stock Take</p> <p>The 'quick wins' were noted in relation to the Task and Finish (T&F) Group recommendations. Regarding recommendation 2, to establish a group to look at office capacity including whether in-house HR is necessary, it has now been agreed to convene a discrete group to address this rather than ask the HR Core Group to take this on.</p> <p>The T&F Group needed to understand better how HR is organised in EDBF, which employs 48 staff, hence the recommendation to set up a time limited expert group to</p>

	<p>undertake a more in-depth investigation into EDBF HR practices. It was noted the T&F report did not identify any deficiencies nor evidence that anything is awry.</p> <p>The Council support the recommendations and for Revd Osborne to take forward. There was a vote on the constitution of the working party, <i>all members in favour</i>. The T&F Group recommendations could be added to the risk register to ensure all is carried out, by whom and the direction of travel.</p> <p>Scheme of Delegation This has been slightly updated since the July meeting and members are now requested to adopt it.</p> <p><i>Motion: to adopt the Scheme of Delegation and Schedule. Proposed by Canon Rob Needle and seconded by Revd Canon Becky Dyball. Approved unanimously.</i></p> <p>Appointment of a Core HR group, Chair of EDBF/Finance Committee, Finance Terms of Reference Recommendation 1 of the T&F Group was for an HR Core Group to be established as a referral body for sensitive issues.</p> <p><i>Motion: to appoint as members of the HR Core Group, Mr Christopher Townsend, Canon Felicity Cooke, and Canon Tim Walters. Proposed by Revd Canon Brian Atling and seconded by Ven Dr Alex Hughes. Approved unanimously.</i></p> <p>Recommendation 5 of the report includes a request to review the Finance Committee terms of reference which has now been done but further detail could be included if the Council felt useful. A related question is who should chair the Finance Committee and who should appoint that chair. Traditionally, the chair has also been the chair of EDBF but, having taken legal advice, it does not have to be the same person. It is undefined how the chair of EDBF is appointed. Several areas operate on custom and practice. It was recognised that the diocesan Articles of Association should be reviewed as this was last done 30 years ago, but agreed such a review would be best done once a new Bishop of Ely is appointed. It was recommended that further review of the Finance Committee terms of reference should be put on hold till early 2026.</p> <p>It was agreed that the Bishop should appoint both the chair of EDBF and the chair of the Finance Committee. It is of utmost importance that the chair has the trust of the Bishop and that they can work together.</p> <p>It was agreed to continue with current custom and practice and to review at a future date. In the event of an appointment being needed, it would be for the Bishop to appoint. <i>Proposed by Revd Canon Brian Atling and seconded by Ven Dr Alex Hughes. All were in favour with two abstentions.</i></p>
8.	<p>Finance: Canon Tim Walters, Chair of EDBF</p> <p>The management accounts to 30 September 2024 for both EDBF and EDEC were received. The accounts are currently ahead of the budget projection, so unless there is an unexpected change in the diocesan investment portfolio before the end of the year, the budget will be on course.</p>
9.	<p>Diocesan Synod report: Revd Sarah Gower</p> <p>The Synod meeting was on 19 October and was attended by the diocesan auditor. A lot of questions were raised around finances. Concerns were raised around the assisted dying bill. Several questions were taken under SO86. Other agenda items were the Deanery Synod Standing Orders and a brief Net Zero Carbon report.</p>
10.	<p>Mission and Pastoral Matters (Bishop's Council sitting as the Diocesan Mission & Pastoral Committee - DMPC)</p> <p>Cambridge ADMPC meeting held on 12 November 2024 and Huntingdon & Wisbech ADMPC meeting held on 13 November 2024</p>

	<p>The minutes of both meetings were noted.</p> <p>Additional terms of reference for ADMPCs</p> <p>This additional document seeks to clarify practice around the creation or removal of licenced clergy posts, ensuring that these stay within the cap of diocesan appointments, and how posts might move from one location to another in the diocese. The proposal is for the ADMPC to first discuss posts in granular detail and then to seek approval from Bishop's Council.</p> <p>It was noted that when numbers were capped at 104, both archdeacons identified posts which did not need to be filled when they become vacant to enable the number to reduce to 104. There is a current operational cap of 96 FTE stipends due to vacancies. Whilst there are vacancies, these are not charged out; the total amount of ministry share is based on 8 vacancies, so all get some benefit. A decision is needed as to what the financial cap will be for each archdeaconry. It was noted that whilst the cap is set at 104 FTE posts, the budget is based on filling 96 posts at any one time. Most dioceses operate on a 15% vacancy rate. It was proposed that the reference to a cap of 96 in para 3 of the additional terms of reference was removed and that para 7, which also referred to 96, was removed to bring more clarity. <i>Proposal agreed, with 2 against and 4 abstentions.</i> This will be brought back to the January meeting. The number of posts will be revisited when the budget process starts in the new year.</p>
11.	<p>Education update: Mr Jon Young, Diocesan Director of Education</p> <p>Mr Young had started on 1 September and felt very well supported. He aims to visit all 84 diocesan schools over this academic year; to date, he has visited 20 and has met with head teachers and chairs of governors.</p> <p>He has found the quality of education in schools to be excellent. There have been 6 Ofsted inspections of diocesan schools since September. The Ofsted inspection framework has changed since September and there is no longer a single grade judgement for schools, but under the previous scheme, all 6 would have been graded good. SIAMs inspections have also removed categorial judgements - these now provide a more qualitative report and offer more bespoke support.</p> <p>There are 40 schools in DEMAT, 4 in ACT and 3 single academy trusts. The Education team will set out an ambitious strategy and will share this with Bishop's Council next year. This will be a collaborative endeavour working with MATs and other stakeholders. The strategy will cover academisation although the new government is less in favour of this. The £25k grant for schools voluntarily wanting to join trusts and cash incentives have also been removed. However, schools will still be required to academise due to poor performance and new schools will start out as academies.</p>
12.	<p>Boards and Committees</p> <p>The following notes and minutes circulated under deemed business were taken as read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diocesan Advisory Committee chair's actions 26 September 2024 • Changing Market Towns Project Board minutes 26 September 2024 • Church Uses Committee minutes 10 October 2024 <p>Diocesan Safeguarding Panel notes 16 October 2024</p>
13.	<p>Dates of 2025 Bishop's Council meetings (all at Etheldreda House)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thursday 30 January at 6.45pm (<i>meeting as Bishop's Council</i>) • Wednesday 26 March at 6.45pm (<i>meeting as EDBF</i>) • Saturday 17 May all day (<i>meeting as Bishop's Council</i>) • Thursday 17 July at 6.45pm (<i>meeting as EDBF</i>) • Thursday 25 September at 6.45pm (<i>meeting as Bishop's Council</i>) <p>Wednesday 26 November at 6.45pm (<i>meeting as EDBF</i>)</p>

14.	Date of next meeting The next meeting will take place on 30 January 2025 at 6.45pm.
15.	The meeting closed at 9.05pm with prayers by the Bishop of Huntingdon & Acting Bishop of Ely. Bishop Dagmar thanked all members who have served during the last three years and to those continuing into the new triennium.